CARSELOWEY, C. V. INTERVIEW. 7474

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Early-Day Ferryboats and Bridges.

On Monday September 13, 1937, the state highway department, assisted by the business men of Miami and the citizens from Northeastern Oklahoma held a grand opening of approximately 13 miles of concrete paving and a $127,000 bridge over the Neosho River, closing the last gap on highway 66, that had been an eyesore to citizens of that town and community for many years.

No longer will flood waters hold travelers impatiently on the banks of the stream, waiting for the water to subside. The new bridge is several feet above the high water stage, and its 1, 283 feet of concrete and steel carry it across the entire stretch of lowlands, over which the Neosho spreads, when at its highest stage.

To Old Timers of this vicinity, this latest marvel of bridge building brings back memories of other phases of transportation across this stream - the fords of wilderness days, the ferryboats of the 90's, the toll bridge of the early

twentieth century, and the low lying concrete span, at Riverview Park.

The Ferryboat Era.

The crude ferryboat was "just as suitable" to its times, as this modern structure. I recall one owned by C. P. Williams, of Miami, and Scott Audrain, of Fairland, that was operated on a toll basis. The ferry landings were located a short distance above the concrete bridge, over which U. S. Highway 66 traffic passed before completion of the new highway route over the new and larger bridge.

The franchise for this ferry was granted by the government of the Cherokee Nation. Teams and wagons were loaded on the ferry, moved across the river, and returned for fifty cents, if the owner desired round trip accommodations. Mr Williams later sold his interest in the ferry.

Along in 1898 came stiff competition. A new ferry was installed a few feet above the other, and it was operated free. As they fought each other for the business the matter was brought to a head.

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Rivalry into Court.

The ferryboat issue was taken into court, which served the area in territorial days. The original ferryboat owner won his fight to enjoin the free ferry management against further service. That placed the profit back in the hands of the first ferry. But times called for more improvements. Travel was becoming too heavy for one ferry. Sometimes teams and wagons would be backed up on the banks for long distances, awaiting their turns to cross the stream. High water sometimes swept the ferryboats down the stream, and it finally was carried off by rising waters, and never returned to compete with the toll bridge, which was being put in.

Toll Bridge Erected.

The Miami Toll Bridge Company was organized in 1901. The United States Court in the Indian Territory granted the company a franchise to construct a permanent bridge, the franchise to continue for twenty years. This structure was erected in the spring and summer of 1901, and served as a toll bridge, until about 1914.

But the ferryboat company didn't want to give up. Its management continued litigation, trying to stave off the

encroachment of the new company. It lost this time, however, and gave up the fight after the Territory was admitted to the Union.

The Miami Toll Bridge Company sold out to the Ottawa County Commissioners in 1914, and surrendered its franchise. The tall structure then became a free bridge. It was located near the spot, where the present South Main span is placed. Made of steel, it had three piers, and the span was approximately 300 to 350 feet in length. When the bridge, now on South Main Street was built, the toll span was dismantled, moved and re-constructed to serve traffic, four miles west of Commerce. It stands there today, spanning the Neosho River.

Fares were Plentiful

Fares were plentiful for the toll bridges in those days. It cost 15 cents for a round trip for a team, ten cents for a person on horseback and five cents for those who wished to cross on foot. This bridge, a $10,000 structure, was perhaps the first toll bridge in this state. It was considered as the latest thing in progress for transportation, at that time.

In 1910, the automobile started to make its advent in this Territory, so the price for an automobile to cross the river and return on the toll bridge was fixed at fifty cents, because it was believed that the vibration might be greater due to the moving engines.

Raft used in Early Days

Before the advent of the ferryboats, the crossing of the Neosho, in times of high water, was a perilous undertaking. When water was deep over thefords, it was necessary to build a pole boat, or raft. These were usually constructed from poles cut from timber along the banks, usually about 12 or 15 feet long. These poles were fastened together with ropes hitched to the poles, at each end, when such fastenings were available. If ropes could not be obtained the poles usually were tied together with hickory bark, peeled from the young saplings along the banks.

These clumsy crafts were navigated by four persons, one at each corner, pushing and guiding it with long poles. Wagons and supplies were frequently carried across the turbulent waters on these fragile crafts, and women and children made the crossings on them.

Capsizing were frequent.

The launching and navigating of such boats were a precarious undertaking. Unless extreme caution was observed, they were often overloaded, and when pushed into the stream, would sink below the surface of the water. Sometimes a corner of the craft would tip, and throw one of the polemen into the water with his pole. Then it was a question of swimming across, or climbing aboard, before the boat was swept out of reach.

Cattle Swims River.

One of the most interesting sights witnessed in this part of the country in the early days was the swimming of vast herds of cattle across the Neosho River. The old cattle trail, known as the "Old Military Trail," from Texas to Baxter Springs and Fort Scott, Kansas, passed through this section, and frequently a thousand or more head of cattle would be driven over this trail, a distance of eight hundred miles, or more, progressing at the rate of about ten miles per day.

When such a herd came to the river the leader would wade in, take a drink, and then return up the bank and lie down. Others would follow suit as fast as they arrived. When the

last stragglers had arrived and followed the same procedure, the cowboys would press in from all sides, unfurling their long cow-whips. Then would follow a long milling about, the steers moving in the same direction, around and around, their up-raised horns presenting a fascinating sight. Restlessly the animals would hesitate to take the plunge, while relentlessly the cowboys gradually would press in, upon them, at the same time guarding against any backward break for the open country.

Finally one of the steers would take the plunge, or would be pushed into the stream by the crowding of the others, and soon the entire herd would be into the stream, swimming in a long line, with only their heads and horns showing above the surface of the water. Cowboys would swim their horses along on the lower side of the cattle to keep them from turning down stream, with the current, which they often did, if not guided across. When such a herd was being put across the river many Indians and what few white residents lived in the neighborhood would come for miles to witness the spectale.